

# Foreword



A few years back I was at my doctor's office, talking with the nurse, asking for some advice. She told me, "Listen to your body."

I sat there and stared at her. I understood the words but I had no idea what she was talking about. "I don't listen to my body," I joked. "I tell my body what to do!" We both laughed but I was serious.

I always felt my body was something to be pushed and prodded into shape, deprived of sleep if necessary, deprived of food if I wanted to fit into a slinky dress. But here was a nurse telling me to be kind to my body. Listen to it. Follow its lead. Let it decide—not just my brain.

It took me a long time to really get it: that my body is me. That it's the only one I have. That it won't last forever. And that, by listening to my body, I can learn how to protect it, strengthen it, and, most of all, enjoy it, delight in it.

That's what this book is all about. Straight-ahead information on the things we can do to stay healthy, tests we should get to monitor our health, how to cope with disease, and how to talk with our doctors. Simply put, how to take charge of our own health.

It's the book I wish I'd had on a sunny day in October 1999, when I sat in another doctor's office, pen and notebook in hand, and heard him tell me I had breast cancer. After years of working as a CNN correspondent, reporting on civil wars and political upheaval, I thought I was ready for the news. I would just jot the information down, do some research, find treatment, and get on with my life.

I could hardly hold the pen. My hand shook. My heart was beating out of my chest.

Later that day, a bit calmer, I began to search for information on breast cancer. Even though my doctor was very helpful and began mapping out possible treatment strategies, I knew that, ultimately, I was the one who would have to decide which options to pursue and for that I needed information. I went to the bookstore, but one look at the rows and rows of books on every conceivable aspect of health and cancer completely overwhelmed me.

On the Internet it was even more confusing. Literally hundreds of millions of hits and links to different Web sites, with no guarantee that the information you find is trustworthy. What I needed was a guide, just like this one, written and reviewed by experts who know what they are talking about.

My experience taught me so much more than the details of cancer. I learned that I had a right, a responsibility to myself, to find the best doctors I could. If I could “shop ’til you drop” for a pair of shoes, I could shop until I dropped to find the doctor I trusted, a doctor who treated me like an adult, who respected me and my opinions. I got a second opinion ... and even a third opinion. I almost gave up, but you know what? The last doctor I saw was absolutely the one I had dreamed of finding, who was positive and fun and made me feel that, ultimately, I would be all right.

I was lucky because the person I loved was there with me all the way, but I also learned that, even if I weren’t so lucky, I didn’t have to face things alone. I joined a breast cancer support group and some of my best memories are of the six of us, all with bald heads—sporting baseball caps, bandanas, or wigs—finding ways to laugh together, even during some of our darkest days.

Finally, I learned that my nurse was right; I really should “listen to my body.” If I really love myself and want to live a healthy life—physically and mentally—there are things I can do to help make that happen. Sure, I don’t always want to get a mammogram and no, I don’t always want to make time for physical activity. And yes, there are things I sometimes am afraid to discuss with my doctor. But I can tell you from my own experience: there is nothing more empowering than being in control of decisions about my health. And, I am happy to say, there is nothing more fabulous than being a healthy woman!

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